

THE Christian Century

Scorecard: who won and who lost on election day; congressional elections

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BYLINE: Burke, Daniel; Cho, Rebecca U.; Roshangar, Keith

Efforts by Democratic candidates to display their faith and connect with religious voters helped produce huge electoral wins in Pennsylvania and Ohio, according to analysts and independent pollsters.

While the national voting patterns of religious Americans were not significantly different from the last midterm elections, Democrats turned the tide among white evangelicals and Catholics in both states, according to John Green, a senior fellow at the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life.

Bob Casey, the Pennsylvania Democrat who trounced Republican senator Rick Santorum, was supported by 58 percent of Catholic voters. "That's a pretty dramatic change" from previous elections, Green said.

In both states, Democrats fielded candidates who could challenge the Republican dominance on moral values. Ted Strickland, an ordained Methodist minister elected governor in Ohio, and Casey, an antiabortion Catholic, are not typical Democrats. But in winning by large margins, they possibly laid out a new path to victory for their party.

Across the rest of the country--in ballot initiatives and local races--there were other big winners and losers:

OHIO GOVERNOR

Who Wins: Religious Progressives

With an intensive outreach to religious voters, Democrat Ted Strickland made huge gains among Catholics and evangelicals and trounced an outspoken religious conservative in his race for governor.

Strickland, an ordained Methodist minister, was able to draw voters away from his Republican opponent, Ken Blackwell, by emphasizing "lunch bucket" moral issues like poverty and the environment, said Mara Vanderslice, a Strickland campaign adviser. "We changed the conversation about moral values," Vanderslice said. "It was impossible for it to be only about abortion and gay marriage."

The challenge for Democrats, observers say, is to keep that momentum and repeat this winning strategy in the 2008 elections and beyond.

MINIMUM WAGE

Who Wins: Religious Progressives

Religious progressives who hope to make the fight against poverty a galvanizing get-to-the-polls issue were encouraged by the voting, in which measures to raise the minimum wage passed in each of the six states where they were on the ballot.

"We succeeded in making this issue the 'values' issue of the 2006 election," said Paul Sherry, a minister who is national director of the Let Justice Roll Living Wage Campaign.

Thanks to barnstorming efforts by prominent preachers and local organizations, religious progressives succeeded in raising the minimum-wage and helped prove that poverty is the kind of issue that can draw voters from across theological and political lines, Sherry said.

In the 2008 elections and beyond, antipoverty and minimum wage measures could "bring out voters who care about jobs and values just as the gay marriage initiatives brought out conservative Christians," said Jim Wallis, a progressive author and activist.

ABORTION AND STEM CELL RESEARCH

Who Loses: Religious Conservatives

Two ballot measures--abortion in South Dakota and stem cell research in Missouri--drew the attention, and the dollars, of religious conservatives from across the U.S. They lost both battles.

South Dakota voters rejected a sweeping ban on abortion that would have outlawed the procedure unless it is necessary to save a mother's life. Had the measure passed, it could have sparked similar legislation in other states, said Carlton Veazey, president of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice. Daniel McConchie, vice president of Americans United for Life, said conservatives will continue to try to chip away at legalized abortion through parental notification and informed-consent laws.

In Missouri, voters overwhelmingly approved a constitutional amendment that allows patients and researchers access to any method of stem cell research, therapy or cure permitted under federal law. Despite the vigorous opposition of the state's four Catholic bishops and the Missouri Baptist Convention--representing the state's two largest religious denominations--the measure passed, 51 percent to 49 percent. Larry Weber, executive director of the Missouri Catholic Conference, said voters were "deceived by a \$30 million campaign" conducted by the amendment's supporters.

MINNESOTA 5TH CONGRESSIONAL DIST.

Who Wins: American Muslims

Democrat Keith Ellison, 43, stepped into history November 7 by becoming the first Muslim elected to Congress. "I think it's a good sign for inclusivity--a good sign that America is willing to call on the talents of all its citizens, whether they're Muslim, Christians, Jews, Buddhists or Hindus," Ellison said.

A former criminal defense attorney who converted to Islam in college, Ellison didn't talk often about his faith on the campaign trail. But his victory sends an unmistakable message, according to Muslim-American leaders.

"The victory opens the door for other Muslim candidates to run for Congress," said Mahdi Bray, executive director of the Muslim American Society. "It also shows that regardless of religious affiliation, you can aspire to be in the halls of government." Moreover, Ellison's win will help groups like Bray's to politically mobilize the millions of Muslims living in the U.S.

Corey Saylor, national legislative director for the Council on American-Islamic Relations, said the Ellison win means "the glass ceiling is broken. We hope it inspires other Muslims into running for a political office."

PENNSYLVANIA SENATE

Who Loses: Religious Conservatives

Bob Casey took more than a Senate seat when he beat Senator Rick Santorum on election day. He also silenced one of the most prominent social conservative voices on Capitol Hill. On a range of issues--from abortion to sexual abstinence to gay marriage--Santorum carried the banner for groups like Focus on the Family and the Family Research Council.

Named one of Time magazine's 25 Most Influential Evangelicals in 2005, the Republican was a fighter who had risen to the No. 3 GOP position in the Senate. "He will be sorely missed," Amanda Banks, a federal policy analyst for Focus on the Family, said in a news release. "Senator

Santorum has always been an outspoken leader on our issues, not just one who voted on the [side of the] pro-family movement, but one who led on pro-family issues."

Casey, like Santorum, is Catholic and opposes abortion. But the Democrat also favors emergency contraception and family planning programs and opposes a federal amendment to ban gay marriage.

GAY MARRIAGE BAN

Who Wins: Religious Conservatives

Religious conservatives scored big in seven states--Colorado, Idaho, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Virginia and Wisconsin--where voters approved constitutional amendments banning gay marriage. But gay marriage opponents suffered their first loss in Arizona, where the measure was defeated, 51 percent to 49 percent.

Twenty-seven states now have constitutional amendments that define marriage as being between one man and one woman. Only Massachusetts allows gay couples to marry.

Matt Daniels, president of the Alliance for Marriage, called the results a "continental sweeping victory for marriage. We've seen for years that the American public is vehemently in favor of protecting marriage."

But the **National Gay and Lesbian Task Force** said the bans against same-sex marriage passed Tuesday with significantly lower margins than in previous elections. "It's clear that fearmongering around same-sex marriage by the GOP and the extreme Christian right is fizzling out," said Matt Foreman, the group's executive director. "It doesn't have the juice it had just two years ago."

CONGRESS

Who Loses: Religious Conservatives

In the House, the religious fight lost a number of its stalwarts, including representatives John Hostettler of Indiana, Jim Ryun of Kansas and J. D. Hayworth of Arizona. Now, legislation clear to many conservatives--such as a bill to keep the words "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance and a parental-consent abortion law--seem doomed.

Moreover, without a strong majority of Republicans in the Senate, groups like Focus on the Family argued, President Bush will not be able to appoint conservative judges to the federal bench. Getting conservative judges confirmed by a closely divided Senate will now be a "politically challenging task," said Carrie Gordon Earll, a spokesperson for Focus on the Family.-- Daniel Burke, Rebecca U. Cho and Keith Roshangar, RNS